A PERSPECTIVE OF JEWISH LIFE THROUGH . . . ITS FESTIVALS

By NIMA H. ADLERBLUM

Courtesy of Bloch Pub. Co.

THE SEDER

(Moritz Oppenheimer)

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By NIMA H. ADLERBLUM

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To

DOCTOR DAVID DE SOLA POOL

and my sister, TAMAR

In whose home one can see Jewish life in its beauty and entirety.

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PREFACE

This little volume has been prepared at the request of Mrs. Joseph Leblang and Mrs. Gabriel Hamburger, the leaders of the Ivriah Organization. It is not meant to serve as a manual, but rather as a glimpse into Jewish life through its festivals. For fuller details the reader is referred, among others, to the following works:

The Three Pillars, by Deborah M. Melamed. (The Women's League of the United Synagogue, New York.)

The Jewish Religion, by Julius H. Greenstone. (Philadelphia, Pa.)

The Ceremonies of Judaism, by A. Z. Idelsohn. (The National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods, Cincinnati.)

Other material may be obtained from the Jewish Welfare Board; the Chicago Board of Jewish Education; Young Judaea; and from Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.

The manuscript was read by Dr. David de Sola Pool, to whom I am indebted for many valuable suggestions.

N. H. A.

A PERSPECTIVE OF JEWISH LIFE THROUGH ITS FESTIVALS

FESTIVALS are the harmonious expression, the outer symphony of our inner feelings of beauty, of relationship with nature, with God and with fellow men. They are the blending of our thoughts, feelings and actions. To celebrate, to commemorate together joys and sorrows, are human needs as primal as the simpler instincts of hunger and self-preservation. It is inherent in man to give vent to his exuberance through outward forms of expression. The mould, the mode of crystallization which the overbubbling of human life assumes, depends upon the degree of human civilization. Festival ceremonies started as far back as primitive man. One of the chief distinctions between human and animal life lies in the conscious celebration of inner feelings and thoughts. In other words, the social dramatization of life is distinctly human. Animals, too, have a congregate life, they flock together, but they do not reproduce this life in concrete and dramatized form through the imagination.

The nature and form of festivals vary like the keynotes of various symphonies. Each nation expresses its festivals differently in a more or less harmonious form. One may say, "By your festivals you may be judged," since one can read the soul of a nation through them. The Greek gladness of heart was expressed in bacchanals; the Roman thirst for fight, in arenas; the oriental hot temperament, in excess of fasting followed by sensual celebrations. The Jewish festival has assumed a higher form of expression. It has become the musical harmony of Jewish life. A Jewish festival is a tender expression of the national soul, a visible manifestation of the joy of living, a running flow of the Jewish stream, a continuous link with the past. It is a manifestation of Jewish life, which life has been transmitted from generation to generation.

One may possibly think oneself Jewish without observing the festival celebrations. But the Jewish festivals have vested Judaism with a certain tenacity of character and individuality. If Judaism is stripped of its vest-

ments of color and warmth, there is left but a skeleton of dry bones. To live a Jewish life without its festivals would be like choosing a life in the desert, instead of one surrounded by scenic beauties. It is so much more gratifying to choose the fuller life, the artistic one, to live the Jewish life in its entirety and find in it a symphony, an organic continuity, the harmonious note and the refreshing tone in re-living the past. In this light let us take a bird's eye view of the Jewish festivals, revealing them as they are experienced by those who lead a complete Jewish life.

One experiences in the presence of Jewish festivals the same sensation as when facing the beauties of nature. One is overcome by one knows not what, a symphony of an esthetic ensemble. Each of the ceremonies by itself may seem to be marked by unintelligible physical activities. But viewed in their entirety, there is a spiritual harmony and tenderness which grips the soul.

Enter a real Jewish home on the eve of the Sabbath and, skeptical as you may be, you will be seized with emotion. There is beauty, there is entirety, there is no break between the present and the past. You have before you a continuous stream of life and you yourself become part of it.

The Jewish woman regards the lighting of the candles on the Sabbath eve as one of her greatest privileges. With deep gratitude she recites the benediction, "Blessed art Thou, oh Lord our God, King of the universe, Who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments, and hast commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights."

With the kindling of the lights, the Sabbath has entered the Jewish home. How spiritual the Sabbath table looks with the white linen, the sparkling silver, the lit candles, all in readiness for the *kiddush* which sanctifies it. With a cup of wine in his hands, the father thanks God for the Sabbath rest, and for His mercy to His people. The women in their Sabbath garb, and the children in their solemn, jolly mood, share in the blessing.

The two twist loaves, called *halah*, assume a spiritual look. There is something mystical about them, and more than that, there is ancestral reminiscence. The same food was eaten by our fathers thousands of years ago, the same kind of wine filled their silver cups, the table was laid in the same manner; the songs, *zemiroth*, and the chanting of the grace before and after the meal, were also much the same.

The preparations start as early as Friday morning. The mother's busy activities on *Erev Shabbath* create an atmosphere of expectation, an eagerness to greet the beloved Sabbath. When the sun sets, the members of the family go to the synagogue to welcome the bride Sabbath, (*kabbalath Shabbath*), and greet her with the song of love, *le-chah dodi li-kerath calah, penei Shabbath ne-kabbelah*, "Come my friend to meet the bride; let us welcome the presence of the Sabbath."[1] On returning home from the synagogue, the father blesses the sons with the patriarchal benediction, "God make thee as Ephraim and

[1] Professor Idelsohn estimates that about two thousand melodies have been created in the course of centuries for the greeting of the Sabbath expressed in the *Le-chah Dodi*.

Manasseh"; and the daughters he blesses with the benediction, "God make thee as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah." *Shalom Aleichem* is then sung by all the members of the household. This hymn is based on a legend of the Talmud that two angels of peace accompany each man home from the synagogue and remain with him and his family throughout the Sabbath. After this greeting of peace, comes the beautiful song of *Esheth Hayil*, the eulogy of woman in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs, which the father sings in honor of the mother of the family, who has endeavored her utmost in the preparations for the Sabbath. Such is the spirit of the Sabbath Eve, an inspiration for many a poet.

Sabbath morning reunites us with the community we live in. We go to the synagogue, we forget the daily worries and troubles, and together with our fellow Jews we pray to God and beg for the renewal of our days as of old, *hadesh yamenu ke-kedem*. During the services a portion of the Torah (the five books of Moses), and of the Prophets is read aloud. The Torah is read from a parchment

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ONEG SHABBATH

(Moritz Oppenheimer)

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THE HABDALAH

(Moritz Oppenheimer)

scroll (*sefer torah*), written by hand, as it was written in ancient times.

On returning from the morning services, the family celebrates the Sabbath meal at home, singing *zemiroth*, and eating the time-honored *chalent* and *kugel*, the main constituents of a meal prepared before the Sabbath on Friday, and kept hot in an oven of glowing coal. Such has been the Sabbath food from early generations. After the repast, and often after a Sabbath nap, the father examines his sons in their Hebrew studies, and reads with them the Ethics of the Fathers (*pereq*), or some psalms. The women have a special Sabbath literature of their own, a popular collection of *midrashic* (Talmudic lore) and ethical sayings. The afternoon is spent in an unconscious revival of the past.

Before sunset another service, *minhah*, is held in the synagogue, and this is followed by the third meal of the Sabbath, popularly called *shalosh se'udoth*. The feature of the *shalosh se'udoth* meal consists not so much in eating, as in rejoicing over the Sabbath and accompanying it to the last moment with

songs and discussions of the Torah. As long as the meal lasts, the Sabbath lasts, too. Its aim is primarily to prolong that glorious day, that day of rest among the days of labor and toil, that outstanding Jewish day among the ordinary ones of the week. It is a day of an extended trip into the past, a day of communion with God and of fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all our forefathers, with those who are known to us as well as with those more obscure.

After the sun has set and the stars have appeared in the sky, our trip to the past is over; the sacred day is at an end. The father chants the *habdalah* (separation), the prayer indicating the conclusion of the Sabbath and the separation between it and the week days, between the day of restful rejuvenation and the days of work. The *habdalah* is chanted over wine, a lighted *habdalah* torch, and spices, *besamim,* kept in an artistically designed box. The purpose of the spices is to delight the yearning spirit when the beloved Sabbath is departing. The *habdalah* also contains a blessing for the creation of the (artifi-

cial) "light of fire," when the spiritual light, the Sabbath, is leaving us.

Who would not emerge a much better Jew after such a weekly spiritual plunge into the living waters of his religious past. To those who have not experienced such a day, it cannot be described; its enchantment cannot be conveyed. To know what it is, to understand what an institution the Sabbath has become in the life of the Jew, one must experience it.

With modern economic conditions limiting many from full enjoyment of the Sabbath, the day still remains a festival in the homes, where the women make the effort to keep up the Sabbath atmosphere. The observance of the Sabbath depends primarily upon the good will of the woman. To her has been given the honor of lighting the candles which welcome the Sabbath; the *esheth hayil* is sung in her honor; the Sabbath is compared to a *calah*, a bride. It is incumbent upon woman to surround the life of her family with spiritual scenery and to create in the home a relaxation from the tense but prosaic world we live in.

PESAH

Pesah (Passover), which commemorates our liberation from Egypt, is a festival most unique among all nations. It is an annual visit to ancient Egypt, during which the Jewish people lives through the whole Egyptian episode of its history. We eat *matzoth,* the unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because our ancestors in their hurried flight had to eat their bread in that state. We eat *marror,* bitter herbs, because of the bitter life of our forefathers under the Pharaohs. We rejoice in their emancipation as if we ourselves had been delivered from bondage, as if God had taken *us* out of Egypt. On the *seder* night, our home becomes transformed into an historical cruise which stops at every point of interest and takes us to Palestine when it was still a promised land. After a journey of two thousand years, we are brought back home with the concluding wish of *le-shanah haba'ah bi-yerushalayim,* "The coming year, in Jerusalem!" We stop on our way with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; we sympathize with Jacob's troubles at the hands of Laban; we live through the hardships of Egypt; and

finally we celebrate our emancipation together with Hillel, Akiba, and the other ancients. We eat our *corach* (a sandwich of bitter herbs and *matzah*) in the manner of Hillel; relate the *haggadah* (the story of Passover) in the fashion of Akiba; we count the plagues with Rabbi Eliezer; we are present at the *keriath shema* discussion of Ben Zoma; we chant God's praises with the psalms of David; we sing the medieval songs of *had gadya* and *ehad mi yodea;* and, finally, we wait for the prophet Elijah to come and drink from our wine and reassure us of the coming of the Messiah.

The historical trip taken at the *seder,* offers as rich an experience in certain respects, as an actual trip on one of our modern cruises. A child who has properly participated in the *seder* ceremony, is bound to carry with him an impression through life. Parents are enjoined to devise all kinds of ways and means to keep the children awake during the *seder* evenings. A number of stories and quaint turns in the *haggadah* are intended for the amusement of children.

How beautiful the most humble Jewish home looks on a *seder* night, when the whole family sits around the dining table illuminated by candles and bedecked with the best one has. The father at the head of the table reclines on a cushion at his left, in an attitude symbolic of freedom. He is no longer a slave, but a king, and the mistress of the house is a queen. All the symbolic food used during the ceremony is arranged on the table in front of him. There are three *matzoth,* covered with a napkin on which may be embroidered the benediction over the *matzoth.* Close by is a dish containing bitter herbs, symbol of the bitterness endured in Egypt, and other vegetables, parsley, celery, lettuce, the *haroseth* and the *zeroa.* The *haroseth* is a combination of crushed nuts, apples, raisins and wine. Its color calls to our minds the clay from which our ancestors were forced to make bricks for Pharaoh. The *zeroa,* bone of roasted lamb, is commemorative of the paschal lamb of ancient days. A boiled egg is used as a substitute for the ancient festival sacrifice. A cup of wine

is set for every member of the family, and is filled and drunk four times with appropriate blessings. A special cup filled with wine, the *kos shel Eliyahu,* is set aside for the prophet Elijah, the hero of Jewish legend, who is awaited in every home on the *seder* night.

The *seder* opens with the *kiddush* benediction. After the *karpas* (parsley) has been served, the father breaks the middle matzah and conceals one part of it, called the *epikomon.* Then he begins chanting the *haggadah,* the story of Passover. "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." The youngest child asks four questions relating to the peculiarities of the *seder,* and the father answers: "Slaves were we unto Pharaoh, in the land of Egypt . . . and if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not brought forth our ancestors from Egypt, we, and our children, and our children's children, would still have continued in bondage to the Pharaohs in Egypt. Therefore, even if we are all learned, all men of understanding, all of us having knowledge of the Torah, it nevertheless would be incumbent upon us to re-

count the departure from Egypt. . . . In every generation, each Jew should look upon himself as though he himself had gone out of Egypt. . . . Not only our ancestors did God redeem, but *us* also did He redeem with them. . . . We therefore are in duty bound to thank, praise, adore and honor Him who wrought all these wonders for our ancestors and for us. He brought us forth from bondage to freedom; from sorrow unto joy; from mourning unto festivity; from darkness unto great light; and from servitude unto redemption; and therefore let us chant unto Him a new song." The first part of the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-114) is then chanted, and the second cup of wine is taken. The *matzoth*, the *marror*, and the *haroseth* are distributed, and the meal is served. This is followed by Grace, and the third cup of wine is drunk. The second part of the *Hallel* is chanted, and the *seder* is concluded with hymns of praise and thanksgiving and several old allegorical folk-songs.

The *Had Gadya* ("Only One Kid") is a parable, regarded as descriptive of the inci-

dents in the life of the Jewish people. The "kid" is said to represent the Jewish nation which God chose from among all the other peoples to be the bearers of the Torah. The "dog" mentioned in the song is supposed to represent Persia, which destroyed Babylonia, and which in turn was conquered by the Greeks, the "staff." The "fire" is Rome, which conquered Greece, and so on, through the everchanging panorama of Jewish story, until finally comes the Holy One, God, and restores Israel in the Messianic period.

So dear is the *seder* to the Jewish heart, that the Maranos[1] would risk their lives to celebrate it in underground cellars and caves, knowing that if they should be discovered, they would undergo the tortures of the Inquisition.

In Palestine but one *seder* night is observed, and the Passover lasts but seven days. Outside of Palestine, the *seder* is observed for two nights in succession, and the festival lasts for eight days. The extra day was added on

[1] The Maranos were Jews who during the activities of the Spanish Inquisition perforce outwardly professed Christianity, in order to escape the horrors of the Inquisition, but remained inwardly faithful to Judaism.

account of the uncertainty of the old Jewish calendar. The festival begins on the 15th day of Nissan, the first month of the Jewish year. The meaning of the word *pesah* is "passing over," hence the English name "Passover." According to the record in the book of Exodus, the angel of death passed over the Jewish houses, when he slew the first born sons of the Egyptians. The festival is also called *hag ha-matzoth,* the feast of the unleavened bread, because for the entire festival we abstain from eating leavened bread, or any food prepared with leaven. It is also called *zeman heruthenu,* the season of our liberation.

One single day was not deemed sufficient to imbibe the emotion of so great an event. The Torah bids us, "seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses" (Exodus XII, 19). This injunction is found several times in the Bible. In obedience to this command it has become customary to search the houses on the evening before the *seder* for any particles of leavened bread that might be hidden in some obscure corners. All this *hametz* is gathered up and burned in the morning of

erev pesah. These ceremonies of searching and burning the leavened bread are termed *bedikath hametz* and *biur hametz.*

Jewish women have contributed much to the observance of these customs. In the weeks before the festival, every Jewish home undergoes a thorough spring housecleaning, the chief object of which is to remove all leaven. Separate sets of dishes and kitchen utensils are kept from year to year for exclusive Passover use. It is the Jewish woman who decks the table and prepares the significant dishes for the *seder.*

In olden times Passover was the occasion for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as were also the festivals of Shabuoth and Succoth. On these occasions, Jerusalem would become the scene of a joyous gathering of the Jews from all over Palestine and even from foreign countries. They brought offerings with them to the Temple, and the High Priest, dressed in robes of scarlet and white, officiated in the Temple courtyard. The Levites conducted the services, chanted the Psalms of David, and played on musical instruments of gold and silver. The

ancient custom of the Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem is being revived nowadays by thousands of Jews within and without the Land of Israel. During the middle days of the Passover week (*Hol Ha-Moed*) popular festivals are held in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and in the towns and villages of Jewish Palestine.

One of the beauties of the Jewish festivals is their knitting of the national life with the life of nature. The two are intertwined, so that there is hardly a national festival which is not at the same time connected also with the life and blooming of nature. Even our precepts, our prayers, express the fusion of the life of nature with the life of the people.

In olden times the early harvest festival was celebrated on Passover, together with the commemoration of the national emancipation. During the Passover pilgrimage, the farmers from all parts of Palestine would bring to the altar of the Temple an offering of an *omer* (sheaf of barley), grain from the new Spring harvest, in accordance with the command in the Torah (Leviticus XXIII, 10). The harvest season started with the harvest of barley

during Pesah and ended with the harvest of wheat around Shabuoth. So accustomed are we to live our Jewish history as if it were part of our present life, that even though the bringing of the *omer* offerings ceased with the destruction of the Temple, each of the forty-nine days between Passover and Shabuoth is still counted at the end of the daily evening service in the synagogue or home.

LAG BA'OMER

In between the commemoration of Israel's national freedom and the celebration of its cultural heritage, that is between Pesah and Shabuoth, there is a semi-holiday which is celebrated on the 18th day of Iyar. This is *Lag Ba'Omer,* which means the thitry-third day of the counting of the *Omer.* It is a romantic holiday, romantic because it calls forth a number of historical associations. It has its roots in the romance of history, the romance of the land and the romance of Spring.

Around Lag Ba'Omer is woven the story of Bar Cochba, and of Akiba and his disciples, who rebelled against the power of Rome in the year 132 C.E. The story has it that a great plague which had raged among the warrior pupils of Akiba ceased on the 18th day of Iyar, that is, on the thirty-third day of the counting of the *omer.* There is also a tradition that it was on Lag Ba'Omer that the manna, the miraculous food which sustained the Israelites in the desert, fell from heaven the first time. Lag Ba'Omer is also the *jahrzeit,* i.e., the anniversary of the death, of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai. Jews from all over

Palestine make an effort on that day to go to Safed, and celebrate the holiday around the grave of this famous saint. In Jerusalem it is customary to assemble on Lag Ba'Omer at the tomb of Rabbi Simeon Ha-Tsadik, and recall our warrior heroes through peaceful contests, national songs and games.

During the forty-nine days of the *sephira*, i.e., of the counting of the *omer*, certain restrictions are observed out of respect for the memory of the pupils of Rabbi Akiba, many of whom died during this period, and also in reverent memory of the myriads of Jewish martyrs who fell during the Middle Ages in the weeks following Passover. It is not customary, for example, to solemnize marriages or to indulge in dances and other manifestations of hilarity. But these restrictions are suspended on Lag Ba'Omer. On that day life is resumed in all its fulness, and the day becomes an overbubbling with the joy of spring, the joy of life. It is the day of the outdoors, spent not so much in physical exercise, as in a certain plunging into history, tradition and legend under a pleasant sky so inviting for a

holiday. Children in Palestine look forward from year to year to this great outdoor excursion. In the minds of the children of Jerusalem, Simeon Ha-Tsadik is the hero of Lag Ba'Omer, the embodiment of all that is beautiful and inspiring in the hills of Jerusalem, the blue sky and the soothing sunset. It is sunset when the children return from Simeon Ha-Tsadik's place. In the twilight of the day, when dreams and realities are welded together, when the saints of history and the heroes of our imagination fuse into one, the history of Israel looms even in the child's mind as a great epic which he feels he must continue to develop and beautify. Lag Ba'Omer is the holiday of dreams, dreams that take you back into the infinite past, as well as forward to a definite future. Lag Ba'Omer recalls the last desperate efforts of Bar Cochba and Akiba to re-establish the national independence. It also dreams of the future, of the romantic Land of Israel, where the pure sky, the glittering stars and the love inspiring moon invite the realization in the outer world of the dreams of one's inner life.

SHABUOTH

Seven weeks after having celebrated the exodus from Egypt on the Passover, we are again reminded of our national historical development with a celebration—in a sense the most important of all—of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This festival falls on the sixth and the seventh days of Sivan, the third month of the Jewish year. It is called Shabuoth, or the Feast of Weeks, because it occurs seven weeks after the first day of Passover. Its most significant characterization is *zeman mattan toratenu,* the season of the giving of our Torah. It is also called *hag ha-bikkurim,* the festival of the first ripened fruit, denoting the blooming and the growth of nature. It seems as if in the Jewish mind, nature, human life and the Torah form but one continuous historic process. The same day which commemorates the receiving of the Torah is also the harvest feast, *hag ha-katzir,* celebrating the "first fruit of thy labors which thou hast sown in the field." The field is beautified with the Torah, and the Torah with the flowers and fruits of the field. On Shabuoth both the synagogue and the home

are decorated with flowers, plants and green branches.

Shabuoth, like most Jewish festivals, has customs and traditions that appeal particularly to the Jewish woman. Foods of milk and honey are traditionally served, because the Torah is likened to milk and honey. Dairy dishes are partaken of to symbolize this festival.

Another and far greater tribute to woman on Shabuoth is the reading of the book of Ruth during the morning services. It is read on this festival, because the Book of Ruth is a lyrical story of nature depicting the harvest, and because the Moabite maiden Ruth accepted the Torah. It should be gratifying to women that on such a solemn occasion as the anniversary of the Revelation, a feminine heroine is featured with such tenderness. The Book of Ruth is read during the services at which the Ten Commandments and the impressive account of God's Revelation on Mt. Sinai are read. So solemn is the account of the Revelation, that a rabbinic *midrash* commenting upon the event states that when the

Torah was given to the Jews, not only were there present all the Jews who came out of Egypt, but also every Jewish soul to be born in future generations was brought down from heaven to stand at the foot of Mt. Sinai to hear the voice of God and receive the Torah.

This *Midrashic* narrative expresses the same idea that permeates the Pesah *haggadah;* namely, that the faithful Jew of every generation experiences the entire history of his past as if it were part of his continuous present. This fundamental characteristic of Jewish life impresses one again on entering the synagogue on the evening before Shabuoth. It is a most impressive sight. The pious Jew spends the entire night in the synagogue preparing himself for receiving the Torah the next morning, as if it were an event actually experienced by him for the first time. He experiences the revelation with the same freshness every year. Throughout the night he reads excerpts from the first and last chapters of all the Biblical books and also from the *mishnah.* These selections are arranged in a book called *Tiqun Shabuoth.*

The women's part in the Torah has been beautifully expressed by our Talmudic sages. They say that the Torah was offered to the women first, and it was accepted by them before it was revealed to the men. For, the latter are bound to follow the counsel of their wives.

The symphony of a festival would lose its harmonious balance were there an excess of any kind, be it hilarious or be it ascetic. The beauty of Jewish festivals consists in their moderate tone, their genuine mysticism, and their power of throwing one back into oneself. The holy days make one leave behind all worldliness and the profane trifles of daily life.

The principal Jewish fast days, with the exception of Yom Kippur, are intended to commemorate some mournful national event. The 17th of Tammuz, the 9th of Ab, the fast of Gedalia on the day following Rosh Ha-Shanah, commemorate the destruction of the Temple and the loss of Jewish national independence. On the 17th day of Tammuz, just three weeks before the 9th of Ab, the first breach was made by the besieging Babylonian army in the walls surrounding Jerusalem.

Tish'ah be-Ab, the 9th day of Ab, is the great mourning day; for on that day both the first and the second Temples were destroyed. The first Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonian king Nebuchad-

nezzar, and the second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. by Titus, who later became Roman emperor. During the three weeks from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Ab, functions of a joyous nature, such as weddings, laying of cornerstones, and other festivities are prohibited. One does not even allow oneself the joy of wearing new clothes for the first time during this period. We are also enjoined from eating meat or drinking wine during the nine days before the fast of Ab.

There is no sight more touching than the synagogue on *Tish'ah be-Ab.* The congregants sit on the floor, with their shoes removed as a sign of mourning, and weep over the lamentations of Jeremiah, crying with him in a mournful tone, *"echah yashevah badad ha-'ir,"*

"How doth the City sit solitary,
That was full of people!
How is she become as a widow!
She that was great among the nations,
And princess among the provinces,
How is she become tributary!"

The curtains are removed from the ark, indicating that the Torah, too, mourns and weeps. With what sincerity and genuineness the destruction of the Temple is mourned! Everyone seems to experience a personal bereavement, a loss which the joys of life could not replace. We are made to feel as if the Temple were destroyed in our very presence. Such a genuine picture of sadness cannot remain without effect on the tender imagination of the child. There is a story of a little four-year old child in Jerusalem, who on *Tish'ah be-Ab* saw her mother in tears for the first time, sitting on the floor in her stocking feet, and mourning. When told the story of the destruction of the Temple, the child went to her playmates, and formed them into an army of soldiers to reconquer the ancient Temple. The next morning they decided to write a book in common, to help their fathers and mothers with plans for the rebuilding of the Temple. They started of their own accord to study Hebrew, so as to write the book. It is an authentic fact that everyone of those children turned out to be leading men and

women in the Zionist world. Such can be the effect made on the child's mind by a sincere observance of the Jewish festivals.

The sorrows of the Jew are always tinged with hope and faith. The hope of returning to Palestine has never been abandoned. According to tradition, on the very day on which the Temple was destroyed, the Messiah was born to restore the land to Israel. The Sabbath following *Tish'ah be-Ab* is known as *Shabbath Nahamu,* the Sabbath of comfort and hope, when the comforting words of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah are read in the synagogue:

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people,
Saith your God.
Bid Jerusalem take heart,
And proclaim unto her,
That her time of service is accomplished,
That her guilt is paid off;
That she has received of the Lord's hand
Double for all her sins."

THE HIGH HOLY DAYS—ROSH HA-SHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

With Ellul, the month before Rosh Ha-Shanah, we reach a period called the "days of awe"—*yamim nora'im.* In these days the center of interest is shifted from the relation of God to His people, to the relation of His people to Him. It is a period when one is thrown in close communion with oneself and with God, when one takes stock of what one has individually contributed to one's people and to the world one lives in. Throughout the entire month of Ellul the *shofar* is blown every morning at the close of the synagogue service, to proclaim the coming days of awe. Young and old, men and women, gather in the synagogue before sunrise to recite special penitential prayers, *selihoth.*

ROSH HA-SHANAH

While Nissan is the new year of the Jewish national consciousness, Rosh Ha-Shanah, the first day of Tishri, is considered the birthday of creation. It is the new year of the universe at large. It is God's new year, because on this

day He lives through everything from the very beginning, just as we live through our whole history on our national birthday. As we express it in our Rosh Ha-Shanah prayers, "Thou rememberest what was wrought from eternity and art mindful of all that has been formed of old; before Thee all secrets are revealed and the multitude of hidden things from the beginning; for there is no forgetfulness before the throne of Thy glory, nor is there aught hidden from Thine eyes." Since this is the day when God beholds His whole creation in its entirety, it naturally follows that this would be a day of Memorial, *yom ha-zikkaron,* when all human acts, good and bad, would be remembered and taken into reckoning. Hence it is also the Day of Judgment, *yom ha-din.* Rosh Ha-Shanah is also called *yom teru'ah,* the day of the blowing of the *shofar,* the ram's horn, the sound of which makes the heart tremble and fills one's being with awe. During the blowing of the *shofar,* the congregation remains standing, filled with reverence and awe. Preceding the blowing of the *shofar* a solemn prayer is uttered, "Help

us, God of our salvation, to subdue our stubbornness and bend our will, so that we may become subservient to Thee." The *shofar* has also an historical association, reminding us of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac. Since a ram was substituted for Isaac, the blowing of the ram's horn reminds us of God's providence.

Although this day is consecrated to the individual, the national historical consciousness is not completely submerged. Prayers of hope for the restoration of Zion are included in the Rosh Ha-Shanah liturgy. On the second day of Rosh Ha-Shanah we read from the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah,

"And they shall come and sing in the heights
of Zion,
And shall flow unto the goodness of the
Lord,
To the corn, and to the wine, and to the oil."

The preparations at home also play a role in this festival of awe. The lighting of the candles, the blessing bestowed upon the children by the parents, the exchange of new year

greetings; the special prayer for a sweet year pronounced over an apple dipped in honey, the preparation of special loaves of white bread, round and smooth, as a symbol that the year, too, may be round and smooth—all such customary ceremonies reproduce in the home the atmoshpere of awe and reverence which permeates the synagogue on this great occasion. *"Le-shanah tobah tikatebu,"* "May you be inscribed for a good year," on the lips of every one, is the greeting of the day.

YOM KIPPUR

The ten days between the first day of Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur are called the *asereth yemei teshubah,* the ten days of penitence. These come to their climax on Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the last day of the penitential period. It is the most sacred of days. The entire day is spent in the synagogue, in fasting and praying for forgiveness of all sins.

On the day before Yom Kippur, late in the afternoon, the family gathers around the table for a solemn meal, called the *se'udah ha-*

maphseketh, the stopping meal, after which the fast begins, shortly before sunset. It is a silent and solemn meal, tense with the feeling that one's destiny for the coming year is to be sealed the next day. Hence, those present ask forgiveness from each other, blessings are bestowed upon the children by the parents, and charity is given to the poor. The bread that is served, and the candles that are lit are shaped in a tapering form, to symbolize that our prayers will ascend to God. Prior to the meal, at the *minhah* service in the synagogue, one relinquishes all grievances that he may have nursed during the year against his fellow men, and in turn asks for forgiveness and attempts to right any wrongs that he may have done to others during the year.

The synagogue services start on the eve of Yom Kippur with the chanting of Kol Nidre before sunset, and end at sunset the next day with the blowing of the *shofar* at the end of *ne'ilah,* the closing prayer.

Originally Yom Kippur, too, was an historical festival. It marked the day on which Moses brought down the second *Luhoth Ha-*

B'rith (the Tablets of the Covenant) on which were engraved the Ten Commandments. After the Revelation, Moses retired to the top of Mt. Horeb for forty days, and when he returned he brought with him the Tablets on which had been engraved the Ten Commandments. During his absence the Israelites in the desert felt lost without their leader. Confused and discouraged, they followed the example of the Egyptians and made a golden calf and worshipped it. This happened just a day before Moses returned. When Moses saw what they had done, he felt bitterly disappointed and in his anger he dashed the Tablets to pieces. After re-establishing order in the community, he again ascended the mountain, and after another forty days he brought down a duplicate set of the original *Luhoth Ha-B'rith*. Tradition has it that this second event took place on the tenth day of Tishri, which is the Day of Atonement. As the second Tablets marked the fact that God had forgiven the community for their sins in worshipping the golden calf, the day on which they were brought down came to be observed as a day of prayer and atonement.*

* The connection of Yom Kippur with the above quoted story of the *Luhoth* is taken from a manuscript on Biblical History written by Rabbi Haim Hirschensohn.

The *Luhoth* were thenceforth guarded most sacredly by the Israelites, and were carried in the Ark of the Covenant throughout all their wanderings. When the Temple was built, they were deposited in the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary, to which only the High Priest was permitted access, and that only on Yom Kippur, when he offered special prayers, imploring God's forgiveness of the sins and transgressions of Israel.

Originally, then, Yom Kippur was a group festival, on which the sins of the collective community of Israel were atoned for and expiated. Gradually, however, it evolved into a religious expression of the individual. On this solemn day the individual feels the profoundest communion with God, and has the fullest faith in His goodness and forgiveness. He is conscious of a perfect understanding between the Creator and His creatures. "Thou searchest all the innermost recesses and triest the recesses of the heart. Naught is hidden from Thee, neither is anything hidden from Thine eyes." Because God knows our innermost thoughts, He will forgive our sins, both

those which we committed under compulsion, and those we committed with free will. Yom Kippur marks the dawn of a new year, the starting of life anew, without fear. The individual feels transformed, for he knows that if he is earnest in his intentions, God will forgive his sins of the past, so that he might live to do good deeds in the future. Yom Kippur, then, gives the individual a new lease on life. It is a plunge into the spiritual infinity where one gets a glimpse of the beautiful and the ideal. The vision of Divine beauty and greatness awakens in us a longing for the good and the ideal, for the spiritual and the sublime. We fast because on that day we feel above all physical forces, and the spirit is entirely master of the body. We feel that we are spiritual beings, capable of being in contact with the world of the spirit, and with the great God who created us in His image. Our gaze into the future gives us a feeling of greatness, and of the possibility and freedom to do good. The humbleness which characterizes the Yom Kippur spirit is not that of defeat and hopelessness, but that of a better understanding of

the ideals of life. On that sacred day when the physical temptations are discarded, the vision of the good looms up before us, and we feel mortified for not having accomplished what we could have attained, had that vision been clearly before us on other days of the year. This attitude of mind may account for the many repetitions of the sin confessional in the Yom Kippur prayers. On Yom Kippur one lives the deepest inner life. The emotion experienced cannot be conveyed by the words of the prayers, nor even by the liturgical poems. It is best conveyed by the atmosphere.

On Yom Kippur Eve, the scrolls of the Torah are taken out of the Ark, and the service is opened by a recital of the *Kol Nidre,* which is sung by the *Hazan* (Cantor) in a moving traditional melody. The worshipper feels stirred and bathed in an atmosphere of exalted emotion.

Memorial Service: A distinctive feature of the Yom Kippur service is the prayer for the dead. We ask God to forgive not only our own sins, but also those of the departed ones. Theirs are the more important sins to be for-

given, since they no longer can make good their errors. Prayers for the repose of their souls (*Hazkarath Neshamoth*) are offered in the synagogue. At home a special memorial lamp is lit to commemorate the soul of a departed relative. This light burns throughout Yom Kippur, and is symbolic of immortality.*

Thus Yom Kippur is the festival of the commemoration of the soul. It is the acclamation of the immortal spirit in man and the earnest prayer that the brute physical forces should not obstruct the spirit within us. It is a prayer for harmony between the spirit and the physical surroundings, so that the dictates of the spirit might be carried out by our material and physical frame. It is the prayer for a unified life, that a perfect unity may evolve between matter and form, between our good intentions and their execution, between one individual and another, and between each individual and God, the Creator of all.

* Memorial Services for the dead are also held on three other festivals: the eighth day of Passover; the second day of Shabuoth; and on Shemini Atzereth.

SUCCOTH

As soon as the pious Jew returns home at the end of the Yom Kippur services, he goes to the yard and starts building his *succah,* the harvest booth. He wishes to go from one religious duty to another, and after his personal purification, he turns to some deed which will identify him with his people and its history. He has spent the day in the synagogue praying for his salvation, for absolution from his sins. Now that he is at peace with himself, he turns to the collective experiences of his people.

Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles, begins five days after Yom Kippur, on the 15th day of Tishri. It lasts seven days. The eighth day is a separate festival, called *Shemini Hag Ha-atzereth,* the Solemn Assembly of the Eighth Day. The ninth day is *Simhath Torah,* the day of rejoicing with the Torah. The intervening days between the second and the eighth are half-holidays, called *Hol Ha-moed.*

Succoth commemorates the wanderings of the Jews in the desert after they left Egypt, when they dwelt in huts or booths. It is also the harvest festival, *Hag Ha-assif,* when our

ancestors offered their thanksgivings at the completion of the entire harvest. One of the Biblical references to this festival, in Leviticus XXIII, 39-44, reads as follows:

"On the fifteenth of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep the feast of the Lord seven days; . . . And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick trees. and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. . . . Ye shall dwell in booths seven days . . . that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt."

It was the season of joy, *zeman simhathenu,* when people from all parts of Palestine would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to visit the Temple and bring voluntary offerings of gratitude for their harvest.

Just as our ancestors in the desert camped in huts during their sojourn in the wilderness, and as the ancient farmers in Palestine spent the nights in little watch huts during the harvest season, so we, too, live during the whole week of Succoth in a hut or booth, the

succah, which is reminiscent of that period. A *succah* must not be a permanent structure, and it must approximate the size of a hut. It must not exceed twenty-five ells in height, and the length and width must be not less than four ells. It is usually built either in the yard or on the roof of the home. It is covered with green branches, sparsely laid, so as "to allow the stars to shine in through the roof."

The pious Jew considers it a *mitzvah,* a meritorious deed, to construct the *succah* himself, rather than hire labor for it. In communities of Eastern Europe where Jewish life has not weakened or changed, the *yeshiboth* (Talmudical academies) are deserted on the day following Yom Kippur. It is a day of outdoors and physical activity for those old bent scholars who spend all their days in the *Yeshibah,* "within the four ells of the *halachah*" (Rabbinic law). It is rather a picturesque and touching scene, how these old men hammer nails, build the walls, and cover the roof. They are exuberant and happy, for they have earned a *mitzvah* greater even than the study of the Torah. For the deed, the merito-

rious act, is always emphasized in Jewish law as leading to spiritual reward. The interior decoration of the *succah* is the function of the women and the children of the family, and should bespeak their artistic taste. The inside is decorated with foliage, flowers and fruits of all kinds. All meals are served in the *succah*. It may be cold, drops of rain may fall through the foliage of the roof, but the joy of eating in the *succah* overshadows all discomforts. We find ourselves in a place sanctified by religion and history. We become imbued with its poetry, and we pray and thank God for having given us the commandment to dwell in the *succah,* and for having kept us alive and for enabling us to reach this season—a season in which we sense poetry and beauty in the historic atmosphere. We try to be in the *succah* as much as possible, for it is a duty to stay in it after the meals, and study those portions of the law which deal with the regulations regarding this festival.

The *lulav,* a palm branch bound with myrtle and willow, and the *ethrog,* a citron, both typical Palestinian plants mentioned in the

Bible, are used in connection with the succoth festival to display the fruits of Palestine. Every morning of the succoth week, except on the Sabbath, a prayer is pronounced over them. The handling of the *lulav* and *ethrog* has become an object of artistic concern. The *ethrog* must be perfect and without the slightest blemish. Even its container is ornamented with artistic engravings. The *lulav* is supported by a triple holder of braided palm leaves. The *lulav* is set in the center, with the myrtle (*hadas*) to its right, and the willow (*arabah*) to its left.

With what deep emotion and tenderness the pious Jew takes care of his *lulav* and *ethrog*. He goes to buy them personally and takes hours to select the most perfect and beautiful specimens. Carefully and almost tremblingly he offers them every morning to the members of his household, so that they may make the prayer and thank God for having given us the commandment concerning the handling of the *lulav*. Both the *lulav* and the *ethrog* are carried to the synagogue every day of the succoth week. It would be hard to

convey the mystical joy and exultation of the one whose *ethrog* happens to be the most perfect. It is not the joy of a prize winner, but the spiritual satisfaction of pronouncing a benediction over the very finest specimen of fruit that the Holy Land has produced.

The *ethrog* and *lulav* have become ethical symbols to which many interpretations have been given by our Rabbis. To some they stand for the various human types which constitute society: The palm leaves of the *lulav* symbolize the proud ones; the willow (*arabah*) signifies the humble ones; while the myrtle (*hadas*) represents those who are endowed with qualities of beauty and not of deeds, i.e., the theorists, the dreamers, but not the men of action. All these types supplement each other, and are necessary elements of society. Each has a purpose in the scheme of the world. But the *ethrog* typifies perfection —that which has both fragrance and substantial value. It unites in itself both beauty and deeds, and thus exerts a beneficial influence on society as a whole. The combining of these four plants into one is looked upon by the

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THE SUCCAH

(Moritz Oppenheimer)

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SIMHATH TORAH

(Moritz Oppenheimer)

Rabbis as symbolizing human solidarity—the union of the strong with the weak, the beautiful with the fruitful.

LULAB AND ETHROG

SHEMINI HAG HA-ATZERETH

On the eighth day we take leave of the *succah* to which all have become so attached that the parting is almost painful. At the synagogue services, the chief feature is the prayer for rain. The life of the past is so strong in our imagination, that even though we do not live in Palestine, and have no lack of rain in our climes, this day of prayer for rain has become the most solemn one of the week. The *hazan* (cantor) wears a special gown, the *kittel* (surplice), which is worn only on most solemn occasions, and chants the prayer for rain in a touching, traditional melody.

On *Shemini Atzereth* we also remember the departure of our nearest ones, and bless their memory. Memorial services are likewise held on the eighth day of Pesah, on the second day of Shabuoth, and on Yom Kippur.

SIMHATH TORAH

The day following *Shemini Atzereth* is called *Simhath Torah,* the rejoicing of the Torah. Again we have an instance showing how closely the Torah and the Land are intertwined. In the same period when there is rejoicing over the land and its fruits, comes also the rejoicing over the Torah. Judaism rejoices equally with the physical as with the spiritual gifts of God. It imbues the physical with spirit and idealism, and makes the Torah part and parcel of the land. The Torah is not a separate entity superimposed upon it.

The genuineness of the joy over the Torah, the deep appreciation of being in possession of it, makes *Simhath Torah* one of the most beautiful Jewish festivals. On each Sabbath day during the year, a portion of the Torah (the Pentateuch) is read, and on *Simhath Torah* the last portion is reached. No sooner has the end portion been completed, than the scroll of the Torah is re-rolled to the beginning, and the first chapter of Genesis is read, indicating that the Torah is infinite and that the Jew will never exhaust it. The reading of the final portion is marked by a beautiful

ceremony. Every member of the congregation is called to the Torah and makes a benediction over it. All boys under thirteen years of age are gathered in a group, under a canopy improvised with a *tallith*, and an adult recites the benediction with them, while the congregation is standing.

Two prominent members of the congregation are usually honored for the occasion of the *siyyum* and *hathhalath ha-Torah*, the ending and the beginning of the reading of the Torah. These honors are called, respectively, *Hathan Torah* and *Hathan Bereshith*, "bridegroom of the Torah" and "bridegroom of Genesis" (the first book of the Pentateuch). These are coveted honors. The *Hathan Torah* usually invites the congregation to a collation at his home, where the rejoicing over the Torah is continued with songs and discussions of Jewish lore and life.

The scene in the synagogue on the eve of *Simhath Torah* would touch even the most skeptical and hardened Jew to a conviction that the Torah is the breath of Jewish life. The Torah is the natural atmosphere out of

which a productive Jewish life has developed. One may be able to describe the physical ceremonies of the evening, but it is impossible to reproduce or convey the atmosphere of genuine rejoicing. There are hymns, religious folk-songs, and processions (*hakafoth*) with the Torah. Children carry flags bearing pictures of the Torah scroll, the Ten Commandments and a *Magen David,* the six-pointed star, popularly known as "the Shield of David." The scrolls of the Torah are taken out of the Ark, and in their place is put a lighted candle, symbolic of the light that emanates from the Torah. Everyone takes a turn at carrying the scrolls in the procession. With what emotional tenderness they are carried through the synagogue! It is as if the Jew were holding in his arms the great mystery and treasure of the world. Such is the rejoicing over the Torah, with which the festival of the ingathering of the harvest ends.

This festival happens to fall at a time when, with the cold outside, one longs for some inner warmth, for some festival and for something with which to feed the child's imagination. The story of Hanukah invests us with courage and hope, with faith in our strength and with a desire for achievement. Our heart is filled with thanks to God for the miraculous way in which the Maccabees fought their battle. Again we revive our history and become one with the continuous Jewish stream. We look back into the past and find strength for the present.

Hanukah commemorates the brilliant victory of the heroic Judas Maccabeus over the vast army of Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, who ruled over Palestine. Antiochus aimed to uproot the Jewish culture at its very foundation, and to replace it with the Greek. He resorted to most cruel measures in order to carry out his scheme. He defiled the Temple, forbade all Jewish observances, attempted to compel the Jews to eat swine, which was so obnoxious to them, and carried out a systematic religious persecution. Those who re-

fused to submit to these humiliations suffered the death of martyrdom. Among the martyrs was the courageous Hannah, our heroine of Hanukah, who saw her seven children cruelly put to death for keeping the Faith. In the year 167 B.C.E., Antiochus gave the last blow to Jewish pride. He ordered that a pagan altar be set up in the Temple, and that sacrifices be offered to the Greek god, the Olympic Zeus. Thereupon, the priest Mattathias and his five sons gathered a small band to resist and attack the troops of Antiochus. After bitter struggles and fierce battles, the loyal Jews under the leadership of Judas, the third son of Mattathias, achieved victory after victory, in spite of the fact that the Syrians were always superior in numbers and in arms. They wrested Jerusalem from the hands of the oppressors, drove out the Syrians, and purified the Temple which had been defiled by the idols which the Syrians had placed there. The altar was rededicated amidst joyous celebrations which lasted eight days. Judas was surnamed *Maccabeus,* the Hammer. It was decreed by him as well as

by the Jewish Elders, that this feast, beginning on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, be celebrated annually for eight days as a feast of *hanukah,* dedication, and also as the feast of lights.

A Talmudic Agadah has it that when the perpetual lamp, *ner tamid,* in the Temple was about to be lit, it was found that the consecrated oil had been polluted by the pagan invaders. There was found only one cruse which had remained sealed and untouched, containing oil sufficient for not more than one day. But by a miracle it held out for eight days, the time required for the preparation of fresh oil. In commemoration of this miracle, we start with one light on the first evening, and light an additional one each succeeding evening until the last day, when all the eight lights are kindled. The lights are lit in the synagogue as well as in the home. In some homes each child kindles his own lights. Father, mother and children chant hymns together for the miracle of Hanukah, and for the kindness of God in having given us the

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A HANUKAH EVENING

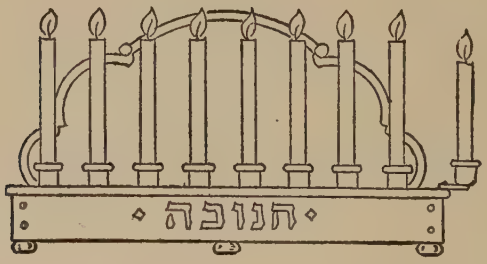
(Moritz Oppenheimer)

privilege to reach this season. The whole household joyously joins in singing the *Ma'oz Tzur,* the Hanukah hymn, in which the Maccabean episode, as well as other historic deliverances of the Jew and Judaism are recalled.

The Hanukah lamp is placed on the window sill where it may be seen from the outside, to indicate to all the victory for freedom and spiritual light. The lights shine forth either from candles made without animal fat, or from wells of oil with threads twisted into wicks. While the lights are burning, no work is permitted, for these joyous religious lights should not be applied to ordinary purposes. Hence it has become customary on Hanukah evenings to indulge in games, particularly such as were played by our forefathers generations ago. The game of *trendel* or *dreidel,* which our children enjoy so much, seems to be a very ancient one. The trendel is a kind of four-sided tee-to-tum or revolving top. On its sides are engraved respectively the Hebrew letters *nun, gimmel, hei, shin,* the initials for *nes gadol hayah sham,* "a great

miracle happened there." It is customary for parents and relatives to make gifts and presents to children, and special cakes are served in honor of the holiday. Thus a joyous atmosphere prevails throughout the week.

The story of Hanukah told in the First and Second Books of Maccabees (in the Apocrypha), is like an epic poem bound to inflame the imagination of children and tie them to their ancestors by the lasting ties of reverence and admiration. One who is born a Jew cannot but feel happy and proud at being the descendant of heroic ancestors who were at all times ready to sacrifice their lives in order to save Judaism and Jewish culture.



HAMISHAH ASSAR BI-SHEBAT
(*Arbor Day*)

The land, that is, the Holy Land of Palestine, is an integral part of Jewish life, history and precepts. While almost every festival has its traditional association with nature and with Palestine, there is one day in the year which is exclusively consecrated to celebrate the land of Palestine and the fructification of its soil. This is *Hamishah Assar Bi-Shebat,* the fifteenth day of Shebat, six weeks after Hanukah. It is the New Year of the Trees, *Rosh Ha-shanah Le-ilanoth,* or arbor day in Palestine. In northern climes on that day we still have the winds and snows of February. But in Palestine, nature is just beginning to awaken from her winter slumber, and the trees begin to shoot forth.

Thankfulness for nature's revival was expressed on that day by the giving of tithes for the maintenance of the Levites and the poor. It was customary in ancient times to plant a tree in Jerusalem for every new-born child, a cedar for a boy and a cypress or a pine tree for a girl. Hamishah Assar Bi-Shebat was celebrated by planting trees other than

fruit trees, which were called "trees of rejoicing." In the diaspora the celebration has taken the form of partaking of the fruits that grow in Palestine, such as dates, figs, pomegranates and carobs.

Since the Balfour Declaration, this festival has assumed a new and richer significance. It has become associated with the rebuilding of the land and with the planting of new trees, particularly in the Herzl Forest. In Palestine this is an especially popular holiday for children. They troop out into the forest, and plant trees, and rejoice over them. "It is joy day in the forest," as Jehoash has expressed it.

PURIM

The Passover Haggadah relates with much emotion that "It was not merely one enemy, but in every generation there arise those who would annihilate us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, delivers us out of their hands." As our history records so many miraculous deliverances, we observe several days in the year commemorating these occurrences. Purim is a singularly hilarious and joyful holiday. The ironical turn of events is the source of this hilarity and joy. On the very day when all the Jews of Persia were slated to be massacred, the instigators of the massacre, Haman and his family, were themselves put to death. The Biblical story of Esther is universally known. Its simplicity, dramatic qualities and touching emotion have inspired many literatures. Racine, the French dramatist of the 17th Century, turned it into a masterful play.

The *megillah* (the Scroll of the Book of Esther), which relates all the events associated with the feast of Purim, is read in the synagogue as well as at home, both on the eve of Purim and also in the morning of the

holiday. The scene is laid in Persia during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), 485 to 464 B.C.E. When the first Temple was destroyed, (586 B.C.E.), thousands of Jews were exiled to Babylonia. A few years later, Babylonia was conquered by Persia. The Jews were granted many privileges under Persian rule. Eventually they were even permitted by one of the Persian rulers, Cyrus, to return to Palestine and rebuild the Temple. King Ahasuerus himself would not have thought of mistreating the Jews, had it not been for the intrigues of Haman, his favorite minister. During one of the king's intoxications, Haman purchased a royal decree for the wholesale slaughter of the Jews, on the alleged ground that "their laws were different from those of every other people; neither did they keep the king's laws." Haman nursed his hatred of the Jewish people because of his jealousy of Mordecai, the Jew. Mordecai urged his niece, Esther, queen to Ahasuerus, to disclose her Jewish identity and risk her life in the hope of saving her people. Thanks to her intervention, Ahasuerus gave a counter

order to spare the Jews and instead, to execute Haman and his accomplices on that same day. Hence the celebration of Purim on that date, the fourteenth day of Adar. The word Purim means "lots." It was by casting lots that Haman chose the date on which to carry out his evil designs.

The book of Esther contains the ordinance that the Jews should make Purim a day "of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions to one another, and gifts to the poor" (Esther IX, 22). It is so inherent in the observance of Jewish festivals to make them not merely celebrations, but so genuine a re-experience of what has happened, that the moods of the respective festivals are faithful mirrors of the historical physical events. Purim is the one occasion when we all are expected to indulge in wine. "Merry Purim," "Happy Purim," are the greetings of the day. During the reading of the *megillah* in the synagogue, the mere mention of Haman's name is the sign for an attempt at unruly din by the youngsters, who equip themselves with special Haman clappers for the occasion. Jests, buffoonery, hilarity,

are in order. It is the Jewish carnival day. Children use horns and clappers on Purim eve. They visit neighbors in masquerade, recite comic ballads, and enjoy themselves in all kinds of merriments. Adults, too, relax in masquerade balls, parties and Purim plays.

Purim again emphasizes the role of women in Jewish history. Miriam helped at the crossing of the Red Sea; Deborah led in the battles of war; Hannah inspired and gave strength to the Maccabean heroes; and finally, Esther saved her people from extermination. Purim is the Feast of Esther, and consequently the feast of all Jewish women. Indeed, women are specially enjoined to attend the synagogue services on Purim, and to participate in the reading of the *megillah*. The *se'udah*, that is, the festive banquet at home, to the success of which the women contribute so much, is one of the chief features of the day. It is a joyous affair followed by games and distribution of gifts. Special dishes are served, such as *kreplach* and *Hamantashen*. These are made of rolled dough, folded into triangular pockets filled with poppy seeds, sugar, honey and raisins.

The day before Purim is observed as a fast day, the Fast of Esther (*Ta'anith Esther*), in commemoration of Esther's three days of fasting and praying before her appearance before the king.

Thus, again, Purim celebrates a miraculous deliverance, and offers us once more an occasion to identify ourselves with our Jewish history. We rejoice with Mordecai's triumph, we sympathize with Esther's sufferings, and we thank God for His constant mercy manifested to us. In one single day we re-enact the whole episode with all its vivid details. With Purim ends the cycle of the festivals of the Jewish year, to begin anew with Passover's call of Spring.

SUMMARY

The festivals which intersperse the Jewish year are the flowers which refresh and brighten the field of our life. They are moral refuges from the world we live in. They are short trips to the world of the past, linking us with our ancestors. It is neither possible nor necessary to live the complete life of our ancestors. Conditions, attitudes, the whole process of life have changed. But we need occasional relaxation from the present, just as we occasionally have to run away from the complexities of civilization and refresh ourselves with a simple, more primitive life. The festivals are thus the basis of the continuity of Jewish life. We eat the same bread on Pesah that was eaten by our forefathers when they went out of Egypt. We pronounce the blessing over the same *ethrog* and *lulav* that were used in the Jerusalem Temple. We chant the same hymns, and pray the same prayers as our forefathers have done for centuries. In a word, we live through the same experiences as our ancestors went through, even as far back as Abraham and Jacob.

What is equally gratifying is the fact that

our festivals are romantic flights into the future with the generations to come. We entertain the hope that our children's children will continue to live through anew the same experiences. The festivals give us the sensation of a link in a chain which prolongs itself without interruption both into the past and into the future. The *hadesh yamenu kekedem,* the desire of renewing our past over again, and the anticipation of an enriched future are felt and experienced in one single breath.

Our festivals are one of the strongest factors of our self-preservation. They cannot be abstracted from the rest of Jewish life, and regarded as but one phase of it. They are not a phase, but an integral and inseparable expression of the innermost Jewish life. One cannot rationalize and try to do away with them without uprooting the very heart of Judaism. They are far more than a dogmatic interpretation of Judaism; they are bound up with the life of Israel. The festivals are various stages of our historic process, crystallized moulds of events that determined our very

life, bringing us face to face with our inescapable history. We can understand the feelings which must have been Napoleon's when, at the foot of the pyramids, he said to his soldiers, that thirty centuries were looking down upon them. The centuries that look down on us give us strength, vigor and purpose, and animate us with the desire of doing for the future what the past has done for us. We feel the obligation to hand over to the generations to come an enriched, rejuvenated and recreated past, a past enriched and fructified through our ancestors.

As women are by their very nature the conservative power of society, making for stability and continuity, the preservation of the festivals greatly depends upon them. They can beautify them, preserve the flavor and essence of the old, and at the same time infuse into them the beauty of the present. It is indeed the woman who gives the festal touch to these days, differentiating them from other days. It is woman who knows best how to sip from the past and inject its flavor into the present.

The educational value of observing the festivals cannot be too much emphasized. They offer the best and most dramatic means of teaching our children Jewish history and literature. Not only historical events, but also literary masterpieces cluster around each festival. The child in whose home the festivals are observed, carries with him indelible impressions through life. Should he be faced with struggle or conflict, the memories of ancient life may tip the scale on the Jewish side. The poet Heine died a Jew, even though baptized, because he had before him vivid pictures of the Jewish festivals of his childhood. The kugel, the chalent, the Sabbath candles and many other homely features inspired some of his most beautiful poems.

The festivals are the atmosphere in which we bathe and breathe as Jews. They are essential for the maintenance of the historical structure of Judaism. The structure itself might have withered through the vicissitudes of generations, had it not been for the emotional atmosphere which has supplied it with fuel and life. Thanks to the life and vigor

which the festivals have given to the intellectual and philosophical structure of Judaism, we may still continue the blessing of the *shehehiyanu,* that God "has kept us in life and has preserved us and enabled us to reach this season," a season in which we still share, in our own way, in the life of our forefathers, refreshing their memory, continuing their existence in ours, and thus prolonging our own life both backwards and forwards. By observing the festivals we thus gain a double immortality: we extend our short life both into the past and into the future for the utmost length of Israel's days.

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